

# College Students' Perceptions of Marriage and Divorce

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## Abstract

We will be examining the associations between college students' perceptions of marriage and their own parents' marital status. More specifically, we will be determining whether or not students perceive marriage to be a negative or positive construct, in addition to their perceived ideal age for one to get married. We will then be examining the associations among students' beliefs about marriage, the self-reported ideal age to get married, and students' own parents' marital status (i.e., single, married, divorced).

## Background

Past research has found that children from married families have a more positive attitude toward marriage and have more positive relationship expectations (Shimkowski et al, 2018) and that people who have experienced parental divorce tend to have an overall negative attitude towards marriage and are more pessimistic about marriage being a long-term commitment (Whitton et al, 2009).

## Hypotheses

We hypothesize that students who have experienced parental divorce will report a more negative perception of marriage as an institution than students who have not experienced parental divorce.

We hypothesize students will report a later ideal age to get married if they have experienced parental divorce compared to students who have not experienced parental divorce.

## Participants

Participants will be UWEC students who complete an online survey through Qualtrics.

## Methodology

Students who choose to participate will partake in an online survey through Qualtrics. The survey will ask demographic information: gender, sexual orientation, year in school, current relationship status, cohabitation habits and parental marriage status. For those, whose parents are divorced, they will also be asked what age they were when their parents divorced. Participants then will be asked to complete a questionnaire about their perception of marriage based off of modified versions of two scales, Marital Paradigm Theory (2013) and the Marriage Perception Scale (2013).



## Implications

According to Cherlin (as cited in Willoughby & Hall, 2015) many people want and expect to get married, but the western culture of the United States has created a higher level of acceptance of divorce. In general, people are choosing to marry later in life than in previous generations. However, the divorce rate is around fifty percent. People generally want a long happy marriage, but for some reason this is not always the case. The rising divorce rate has emerging adults unsure that their expectations of marriage will be met by their future partner (Willoughby & Hall, 2015). There tends to be an expectation that a person's first marriage will not last.

The costs of leaving this only partially solved include not having the knowledge about the next generation of couples, since the United States population as a whole is marrying later in life while some are choosing not to marry at all. Whereas the benefits of fully understanding the dynamic between parental divorce and marriage perceptions include having a better understanding of how college students view marriage, which will give an insight into the likelihood of college students choosing to be in a long-term commitment in the future.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

This research is supported by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at UWEC.